

Study of Reporting on Chinese Communist Intervention in Korean War
THE FALLACY OF CONSISTENCY IN INTELLIGENCE

(Notes for a possible study concerned with intelligence estimates.)

The estimating done in connection with Chinese Communist intervention in the Korean War (See study on this subject) demonstrates certain dangers that reside in highly official estimating as presently done under the ONE-IAC system.

The final achievement of an agreed position on a matter of vital importance to intelligence and to policy, automatically suggests future consistency with this position. The tendency thereafter toward a "what-did-we-say-about-that-in-our-last-estimate" state of mind is difficult to escape.

Particularly with respect to broad estimates of intention this can lead to blind acceptance of officially established position in place of keen observation of fact. This is particularly likely to be the case in the intelligence field where axioms are rare. In the absence of reliable axioms, conclusions must be based on reasoning from often inadequate evidence. With respect to conclusions on grave matters of state policy, this process is uncomfortable. Hence, a fully concurred, official estimate, taking the place of a reliable axiom is welcome.

Specifically in the case of Chinese Communist intervention in Korea, the first axiom was a long-accepted estimate that the USSR did not want, and would not risk, a world conflict. Assuming (as was done) that the USSR was responsible for the North Korean invasion, this estimate was somewhat shaken. There were reasons, however, to suppose that the USSR had "ordered" the invasion in the belief that it would not result in world conflict. The estimate, therefore, still stood.

When CIA noted the signs of Chinese Communist intervention after the war had begun, it reasoned (a) that China would not act apart from Soviet orders, and (b) that the USSR would not give such orders because the result of Chinese Communist troops in direct conflict with US troops would be war between the Communist and non-Communist worlds. On September 8, 1950, CIA produced an estimate whose reasoning from observed fact led straight to the conclusion that full-scale intervention was a distinct probability; but concluded instead that the Chinese would confine themselves to token assistance to North Korea on grounds going back to the assumption regarding the USSR.

On October 12, CIA produced its first estimate in some time with full IAC concurrence, in which it found (barring various improbabilities) that no Chinese Communist intervention would occur during 1950. The main reliance of this estimate was the same assumption about the intentions of the USSR. Actually, as can be seen now, this was a time when the decision to intervene had probably been made by the Chinese, presumably (though the fact is not established) with Russian concurrence.

The estimate of October 12 naturally carried great weight thereafter. It represented full agreement by five different intelligence agencies which did not always see eye to eye, on a vital and controversial subject. It would have been presumptuous, thereafter, for any of these agencies, including CIA, to draw conclusions contrary to this agreed position.

It was between October 12 and November 26 (when the first Chinese Communist offensive started) that signs naturally mounted of what was about to take place. Yet all CIA official publications during this period, ignored, discounted, or explained away these signs. Without reference to

the official assumptions about the Chinese Communists, the Russians, and the war, the resultant reasoning would be unbelievable today.

(NOTE: If a study were to be written on this subject, it would not have to depend on this one example, there having been others.)

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COMMENTS BY GSJ ON SUGGESTED REVISION TO W 10-250-3, 3 MAY 1955

1. I feel that paragraph 1 could be better. At a minimum I should substitute might or the equivalent for may in lines 6, 7, and 10 of the paragraph because of possible confusion with the permissive may. At a maximum, I should rewrite the paragraph as follows:

"1. National Security Council Intelligence Directive No. 12 states as an 'expression of policy of the National Security Council' that '...any publicity, factual or fictional, concerning intelligence is potentially detrimental to the effectiveness of an intelligence activity and to the national security.' It directs the heads of all IAC agencies to '...take steps to prevent the unauthorized disclosure for written or oral publication of any information concerning intelligence or intelligence activities.' Since all CIA employees are bound by security regulations forbidding conversation on subjects related to the agency with unauthorized persons, this policy simply emphasizes for the individual employee the importance of circumspection in conversations involving persons employed in the publicity field."

It can be taken for granted that newspapermen, or representatives of other media of public information, will publish anything they hear, or overhear, deemed to have an interest for the public. From their point of view, Central Intelligence and its activities normally have considerable interest for the public. It is therefore incumbent on all Agency personnel, in business

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or social conversations, to be particularly sensitive to the presence of public media representatives or persons who might purvey information to them. Mention of any matters having to do with the Agency, with its activities, or with Agency-derived information relating to current events or matters of public interest, in circumstances that might lead to publication in media of public information, is strictly forbidden.

2. In paragraph 3, I should omit the last sentence of subsection c on grounds that the idea expressed is already in security regulations, as well as already implied above.

3. I am not sure that paragraphs 3 and 4 make entirely clear what the employee is to do when he has unavoidable contacts with the press. For this reason, I should be inclined to append some sort of form to the directive to act as a guide in reporting such contacts. Maybe this form would not appear as part of the memorandum, but would be made available. It would go somewhat as follows:

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR
FROM: _____
SUBJECT: _____

1. I have the following relatives who are employed by or connected with media of public information:
2. I do not discuss matters relating to the Agency with them. (It would be stated that this would be a one-time report.)

And a separate form with same type of heading:

1. On (date) at (place and occasion) I talked with the following person(s) connected with media of public information:
2. The substance of our conversation was as follows:

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3. The person(s) involved seemed (did not seem) interested in particular topics relating to the Agency or its activities (specify topics if any).

And perhaps a third:

1. On (date) at (place and occasion) the following person(s) connected with media of public information was (were) present:
2. I did not talk with him (them) on this occasion.

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